

The Motel in America

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Were the owners independent, or did they tend to develop relationships with national firms? Did African-Americans have an opportunity to own and operate gas stations? Did rural service stations embrace the "place-product-packaging" model as readily as urban stations, or did a greater degree of independence exist? Did oil companies develop strategies specific to rural areas? The potential for additional scholarship is great.

Jakle and Sculle convincingly explore the importance of the gas station in American culture. America has always been a nation on the move, and this work discusses the development of this important twentieth-century development. Readers can look at roadside architecture in a new way after reading this text, and consider the validity of the model, and the larger role of the gas station in America.

The Motel in America, by John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle, and Jefferson S. Rogers. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996. xiv, 387 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY RICHARD P. HORWITZ, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

During the twentieth century, motels have become so ubiquitous in the United States that it is hard to imagine a destination without one. As these coauthors (two geographers and a historian) explain, the motel represents both a distinctive monument to modern taste—a mixture of restlessness and a yearning for bland comfort—and business as usual.

Until the 1910s and 1920s, when most travel funneled through depots and ports, drowsy businessmen and tourists relied on full-service, downtown hotels. But as those folk, now more often with family in tow, took to travel by car and as the highway system grew, entrepreneurs provided lodging better tailored to automobility. In the 1920s, mom and pop built and staffed minimalist renditions of home, such as those funky cabin courts that now attract South Asian immigrant investors and nostalgia marketeers. In the 1930s and 1940s early chains, such as the Alamo Plaza, built more respectable regional referral networks. Through trade associations, technical advances (plus "amenity creep"), massive capital resources, and tax advantages, the postwar future belonged to titans such as Holiday Inns. During the 1970s and 1980s the various franchisers further professionalized, feverishly grooming themselves and their subsidiaries for particular market shares and punching out roadside structures to

match. America's roadsides now provide ample testimony to the utility of "place-product-packaging" prophecy.

In telling this story, the coauthors build on a scholarly tradition of pop-culture interpretation that they—particularly Jakle—helped establish. (See, for example, Jakle's *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* [1985] and his and Sculle's *The Gas Station in America* [1994].) For this book they follow a line commonly associated with Chester Liebs and Warren Belasco (Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* [1985]; and Warren J. Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* [1979]). Motels, they say, should be read as a material, chronological record of management's success in fashioning the roadside ever more precisely to fit the desires of an automobile citizenry. Each site, then, captures a moment of popular fancy, and whole roadside sectors "express" the drift of national culture. Since the book pursues this familiar (though highly contestable) line into the recent past, *The Motel in America* can well be considered a straightforward extension of Belasco's *Americans on the Road*.

With the exception of some brief references to Herbert Hoover and Heartland Inns, Iowa draws no special attention. The declining importance of geographic or cultural diversity is part of the point. Rather than local color, the reader gets a trajectory (that Iowa presumably shares with Everyplace) plus thumbnail histories of almost every brand name in the business. The authors' generalizations are developed and grounded through a few well-chosen examples of particular businesses (such as Wigwam Village, Alamo Plaza, and Holiday Inns), associations (the American Motor Hotel Association), careers (Torrance, Edmundson, Gresham, Wilson), and settings (Albuquerque).

Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers have assembled a wealth of information on the evolving morphology of the motel, its layout and furnishings, as well as the structure of the industry and each of its most well-known constituents. There are particularly evocative prints of postcards and kindred memorabilia as well as useful maps and tables. What is missing is a more developed, critical point of view. As in Belasco's early work, we learn a lot about what members of an investing class claim to want and to achieve, but most of the rest of the analysis depends on an assumption that this class is simply correct, as if the free enterprise system were a perfect meritocracy. In winning (or losing) their fortunes, owners speak for the rest of us, those whose labor or spending they skim. After only briefly considering ways that other classes may figure in the motel world, it is small comfort that on page 330 (of a 340-page text), the authors ask, "What

is the real significance of motels in the American experience?" and welcome further research. *The Motel in America* might well then be considered the latest elaboration of an interpretive line that begs for new direction.

Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity, by Diane Barthel. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996. ix, 182 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$48.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY RICHARD V. FRANCAVIGLIA, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

Historic preservation has deep roots in American history, but the movement truly came into its own with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. In the thirty-plus years since, historic buildings and even entire districts have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and numerous properties have been rehabilitated through the use of preservation grants and tax credits as well as private funding. Having reached such importance, historic preservation has become part of the American mainstream—that is, its age and respectability have made it an institution. Like all such institutions, preservation has galvanized strong supporters and passionate detractors. It stands to reason, then, that preservation has also become a valid subject for critique among academicians and other interpreters.

Diane Barthel's *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* is a new arrival in a growing list of preservation books that follow classics such as William Murtagh's *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation* (1988) and David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985). Like the latter, Barthel compares preservation in the United States and England. Being a sociologist, however, Barthel considers preservation to be "cultural capital"—a kind of spiritual currency that benefits its holders. Although its practitioners can make money in the field, Barthel notes that "the people involved in these activities like to see themselves as performing a public good whether the public appreciates it or not" (13).

Divided into a series of themed chapters that cover a wide range of topics such as utopia, industrial society, war and remembrance, religious preservation, and consuming history, this book is broad in scope and sweeping in its generalizations. It touches upon almost every conceivable facet of historic preservation, and reveals just how all-encompassing the movement has become. Although Barthel uses specific examples to illustrate points, she is especially interested in

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